

on their economic structure and emigration policies. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Following a Tour of the Choral Synagogue in St. Petersburg May 26, 2002

Religious Freedom in Russia

The President. Good morning, everybody.

Q. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Today we've had a—beautiful morning. We've been to a church and a synagogue. One of the nonnegotiable demands of individual dignity is freedom of religion, and I'm impressed by what I've heard from religious leaders, Christian and Jewish, here about the state of affairs in Russia.

We went to a cathedral that up until recently was a museum of atheism, and today it's a place where people can worship God freely. We've been to a synagogue that was, even though open, was not a welcoming sight for many Russians, and today it is a spectacular place for people to gather and worship an Almighty God—and worship an Almighty God freely.

And one of my strong beliefs is that people should be free to worship, and I'm pleased that that's taking place here in Russia. It's important for this country that religious freedom flourish and there be tolerance of all faiths.

And it's been a very rewarding morning for Laura and me, and we want to thank our hosts and thank the Russian people. Last night I was very impressed and pleased to see so many Russians lining the streets, and they were so welcoming to the American delegation. We're making great progress in our strides toward freedom—I mean, toward friendship and our mutual respect of freedom. Thank you for your hospitality.

Pakistan-India Relations

Q. Mr. President, yesterday Pakistan went ahead with their planned missile tests.

The President. Yes.

Q. Do you think that has had any impact on the situation there? And do you believe this is something they should have gone forward with at this point in time?

The President. As you know, we expressed our strong reservations about the tests. Obviously, we hope that there is restraint in the area, that that not be viewed as a provocation. We're continuing to work the diplomatic channels, as are other nations. I mean, everybody understands the danger of a serious conflict in the region. And slowly but surely we can erode the distrust that has arisen in the area so that they can—

Q. Do you think the situation is as tense and dangerous there now as it was in January, where in hindsight it appears they came very close to an armed conflict?

The President. I think that anytime you have countries with nuclear arms, that a tension, serious tension is dangerous. And it's hard for me to measure the degree of tension. Let's just say it's tense now, and it was tense then. So we've just got to continue to work the problem, and we will. I'm hopeful that we'll be able to defuse the situation.

Palestinian Authority

Q. Mr. President, are you inclined to agree with your advisers who say that we should deal with Chairman Arafat, or those who think he should be frozen out?

The President. Well, you know, I get all kinds of advice. People know my opinion about Chairman Arafat, and that is that he has let the Palestinian people down. He hasn't delivered. He had a chance to secure the peace as a result of the hard work of President Clinton, and he didn't. He's had a chance to fight terror, and he hasn't. Evidently there's a new attitude emerging among some of the leadership in the Palestinian Authority, and the answer is, we'll see. We'll see if he can deliver.

The key for the—for peace in the region, as far as I'm concerned, is for the Arab world to continue to fight terror, to do what they say they're going to do—we believe that that's happening more than ever—and that we develop the institutions necessary so that a Palestinian state can emerge that will be at peace with Israel. And that start—first step is to have a security force that actually keeps the security, as well as the reforms ought to align authority and responsibility so people can be held to account for success or failure.

Q. I just want to follow up and make sure I understand what you are saying, when you're saying that apparently there's a new attitude in the Palestinian Authority and we'll see. Are you—

The President. Well, you're beginning to see talk of reform. You know, if you read the press accounts, there's—people are beginning to question out loud as to why there hasn't been success. One of the things that we've been trying to do is to say people must be responsible. My speech on April 4th called upon—outlined the responsibilities necessary to achieve peace.

So I'm beginning to hear—this is publicly I'm beginning to hear, I might add—discussion about, “Well, maybe we ought to assess how to make the Palestinian Authority more accountable,” and that's what I was referring to.

Q. But you're not referring to any good words or deeds you're seeing out of—seeing out of Arafat. So are you saying that the time has now run out on Arafat and

we're not going to deal with him, or he's still got a chance to do it right?

The President. No, what I'm saying is that what we need to do is develop the institutions necessary for there to be a responsible Palestinian state. And it starts with security.

One of the things that's interesting is, when you talk to European leaders, there's an interest about helping the Palestinian people—the Palestinians with economic development, but it's hard to promote economic development when there is concerns about graft and corruption. And so there needs to be—there needs to be institutions that will be transparent, institutions that will hold people responsible for the expenditure of money, institutions necessary to make sure that the good hearts of the world, when they apply to the Palestinian people, will be met with good results.

Q. Can I follow on Ron's [Ron Fournier, Associated Press] question?

Q. Sir—

Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Q. Is Director Tenet going back to the region this coming week?

The President. You've had a big day today, Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News]—three questions.

Q. It's because he's taller, you know.

Q. That's a pool, because we all want to ask that one, though.

The President. He's also booming. He's also booming out there with his question, butting in. No—anyway—[laughter]—

Q. My apologies to Patsy [Patricia Wilson, Reuters].

The President. Poor Patsy, here she is trying to be dignified—

Q. That was my question, anyway.

The President. It was your question?

Q. Yes, I was trying to be dignified.

The President. Well, would you like to ask it, so you can—

Q. Sir, is Director Tenet going back to the region next week? [Laughter]

The President. As you know, I expressed—I said that I was going to send Director Tenet back to the region. I haven't changed my mind.

Q. Next week?

Russia's Role in the Middle East Peace Process

Q. [Inaudible]—the role of Russia on the Middle East question?

The President. Well, President Putin has been very helpful. And he's been helpful because he has—he has insisted that there be accountability and responsibility in the region. And he has been a—he makes it

very clear that the Russian Government is—rejects any kind of terrorist activities that disrupts the peace process, in a very strong voice for reason and for reasonable policy, and I appreciate that a lot.

Thank you all.

Q. This week for Director Tenet?

The President. See you in France.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:49 a.m. outside the synagogue. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With President Jacques Chirac of France in Paris, France

May 26, 2002

President Chirac. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Welcome here. Welcome to all of you here this afternoon. Of course, I extend a special welcome to the members of the press who have come with President Bush.

Can I, first of all, say how pleased I am that we'll have the opportunity to welcome on his first trip to France the President of the United States and his wife. It's, of course, a great pleasure for me to welcome them, and I think it's also a great pleasure for all the people of France to welcome them. And that is something that I wanted to say in no uncertain terms.

We had this afternoon a working session. We'll meet again over dinner. Tomorrow, as all of you know, President Bush will be in Normandy. And I think it's very moving for me and for the people of France to know that, for the first time ever, if I'm not mistaken, the President of the United States will not be in the United States on Memorial Day, and that on this occasion the President will come and pay a solemn tribute to the great number of

young American servicemen who gave up their lives to fight for France, for Europe, for freedom.

This fight for freedom, for liberty, is a constant fight, a fight that we all engage in, a fight that is a bond between the peoples of both sides of the Atlantic, a fight that is pursued still today under very specific ties, the fight against terrorism.

We exchanged views. We had an intense, candid, friendly exchange of views. And I think this echoes and epitomizes the nature of the dialog that we have had ever since President Bush's election, in the number of contacts we have had either in Europe or when I have been to the United States. I think the last time we met was when we both were in Monterrey, in Mexico, and also over the phone.

We mentioned a number of issues: the fight against terrorism—and in this respect, we have a similar understanding of what is being done and what should be done to fight and eradicate terrorism. We both know that terrorism still exists, that it can be active anywhere, at any time, and that,